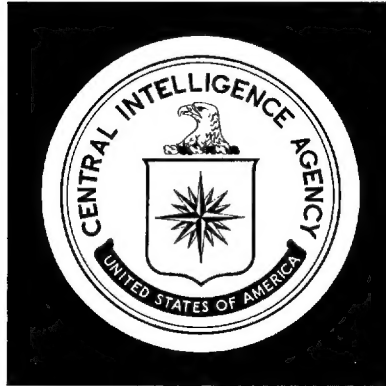


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# Intelligence Memorandum

*The Current Status of Military Forces in Laos*

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April 1973

## The Current Status of Military Forces in Laos

### Key Judgments

Both the Communists and Royal Lao Government (RLG) forces suffered relatively heavy losses in last year's fighting in Laos. Since then, the Communists have substantially augmented their combat forces, while friendly forces have remained fairly constant.

- At this time, in terms of raw military manpower, neither side enjoys a clear advantage. The Communists have a somewhat larger total force but fewer combat troops than the Royal Lao Government.
- The qualitative advantage, however, clearly lies with the Communists and time is on their side. Perennial problems of poor leadership, inadequate training, and a low degree of motivation continue to plague friendly forces. These problems will be exacerbated by the drawdown of US advisers.
- Further, with Hanoi's impressive commitment of long-range field guns, antiaircraft artillery, and tanks to Laos over the last 18 months (coupled with the elimination of US combat sorties), Communist forces now have a clear firepower advantage over the RLG.
- Both sides are currently in strong logistical positions, but if heavy fighting were to resume, the RLG -- heavily dependent on air resupply -- would encounter serious problems in maintaining its front-line logistical support without outside help.

On balance, then, considering all elements of the military equation -- manpower, logistics, and firepower -- the Communists have the capability to undertake major sustained military activity in either northern or southern Laos in the near future. It seems likely that the RLG would be unable to cope with such an offensive, barring massive outside assistance.

## DISCUSSION

### The Manpower Balance

#### *Communist Forces*

1. The Communists continue to maintain substantial combat and administrative services forces in both northern and southern Laos. NVA forces in Laos are roughly comparable in equipment and effectiveness to NVA forces in South Vietnam. They have borne the major brunt of Communist-initiated combat operations and are the best disciplined and led troops fighting in Laos. The Pathet Lao (PL) are used primarily to hold and administer an area, once taken, and in a sense their role is "pacification." The combat effectiveness of the mixed PL/NVA units varies according to the size and role of the NVA complement. On the other hand, the Dissident Neutralists (DN) are of little significance as a combat threat. They appear to be maintained primarily for political purposes, as they are intended to form the military basis for the Communist claim that the DN (including allied political forces) are the "true neutralists" in Laos.

2. Currently there are in Laos an estimated 117,000 enemy troops, equally divided between combat forces and administrative services troops, as shown in Table 1.

3. Total enemy forces in Laos reached a peak of about 135,000 in late 1971-early 1972. Since that time, two North Vietnamese infantry divisions -- the 2nd and 312th -- redeployed into northern South Vietnam. The number of administrative services personnel throughout Laos, however, currently is near its historical high first reached in late 1970 -- despite the shifting of large numbers of administrative services personnel to northern South Vietnam in mid-1972.

4. Currently, there are approximately 32,000 Communist combat troops in northern Laos in nine NVA regiments<sup>1</sup> and independent battalions, as well as numerous PL and DN units. Since late 1972 the Communists have augmented their combat forces in northern Laos -- primarily with the deployment from North Vietnam of the 88th Regiment of the 308B Division to the Plaine des Jarres (PDJ) late in the year. The PL and DN in northern Laos have remained relatively unchanged for a least a year. Although the combat effectiveness of these troops has improved, qualitatively they are

1. The 8th, 88th, 148th, 174th, 335th, and 866th Infantry Regiments, plus the 772nd Group, 226th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment, and an unidentified artillery regiment.

Table 1  
Communist Military Forces in Laos, by Region  
as of 13 April 1973

	Total	North	South
<b>Total</b>	<b>112,000</b> <b>(117,000)<sup>1</sup></b>		
Regular combat			
forces	58,500	31,600	26,900
NVA	38,900	17,000	21,900
Pathet Lao <sup>2</sup>	19,600	14,600	5,000
Administrative			
services	53,500 <b>(58,500)<sup>1</sup></b>	9,400	44,100
NVA	48,900	6,200	42,700
Pathet Lao <sup>2</sup>	4,600 <b>(9,600)<sup>1</sup></b>	3,200	1,400

1. It is estimated that there are about 5,000 more personnel in PL administrative services units throughout Laos. Currently, however, we are unable to distribute these personnel on a unit-by-unit or geographic basis.

2. Including some 2,000 Deuane and Khammouane Neutralists in combat and administrative services units.

still below their North Vietnamese mentors. Nonetheless, the better PL and DN units have proved to be a match for the Royal Lao Army (FAR) and irregular forces, especially in the area west of the PDJ where traditionally they have been strongest.

5. Communist combat forces in southern Laos currently number about 27,000 men, of which about 80%, or some 22,000, are estimated to be North Vietnamese personnel. During the past year, three new North Vietnamese infantry regiments were created primarily from personnel already operating in southern Laos, while three others deployed there from North Vietnam.<sup>2</sup> The deployment of these units both augmented the enemy's combat force structure and strengthened its command and control in southern Laos.

2. These include the 19th, 49th, 52nd, 59th, and 102nd NVA Regiments, as well as the 972nd Front.

### *Friendly Forces*

6. Friendly forces in Laos consist of the Royal Lao Army (FAR), pro-government Neutralists (FAN), guerrilla forces, the Royal Lao Air Force (RLAF), and Thai volunteer troops.

7. None of the friendly forces are a match for the NVA. The combat effectiveness of the Meo has declined considerably during the past two years of heavy fighting. The irregular Lao units in Military Regions (MRs) III and IV have in the past given good accounts of themselves in combat operations against the NVA, but their capabilities are likely to be adversely affected as their integration into FAR is completed. The Thai forces cannot be counted on to resist any sustained NVA pressure without massive US tactical air support. PL and FAR/FAN troops are probably about evenly matched in terms of general effectiveness of individual troops and battalions.

8. Currently, there are a total of 95,000 friendly forces throughout Laos, of which more than 65,000 are ground combat troops. The number of friendly forces in Laos has not changed appreciably over the past several years. Since late 1970 the number of personnel in guerrilla units has declined somewhat, but the continuing commitment of the Thais has offset this.<sup>3</sup> Table 2 shows the deployment of friendly ground forces, by geographic area, as well as the total number of personnel in the Royal Lao Armed Forces.

9. In order to comply with the 1973 cease-fire agreement -- which calls for the disbandment of "special forces organized, trained, equipped, and controlled by foreigners" -- all Lao irregular units were to be integrated by early April into the FAR 1st and 2nd Strike Divisions, which operate in northern and southern Laos, respectively.

10. While the friendly combat forces possess a slight numerical superiority over the Communists (more than 65,000 versus 58,500), it has always been clear that they have been outmatched by the combined combat forces of the NVA and the PL. Apart from the element of firepower which will be discussed in the next section, the most serious liability facing FAR/FAN forces has been lack of motivated leadership and fighting spirit. The morale of FAR/FAN troops reached its nadir immediately before the cease-fire and has risen somewhat since that time. But the basic problems

3. Should the 17,000 Thai troops now in Laos be withdrawn gradually after a coalition government is formed, however, friendly manpower strength and capabilities would deteriorate substantially. Because of contract expirations alone, the size of the Thai force in Laos would normally be reduced by about 15% in the next nine months and by nearly 40% during the next year. However, the Thai government is being asked to extend as many troops as possible beyond their contract expiration date.

Table 2

Friendly Military Forces in Laos, by Region  
as of 13 April 1973

	Total	North	South
<b>Total</b>	<b>95,000</b>		
Royal Lao Army (FAR) <sup>1</sup> and the Pro-government Neutralists (FAN)	50,000 <sup>2</sup>	27,000	23,000
Guerrilla Forces	26,000 <sup>2</sup>	16,000	10,000
Royal Lao Air Force (RLAF)	2,000	N.A.	N.A.
Thai Forces	17,000	13,500	3,500

1. Including irregulars integrated into the FAR 1st and 2nd Strike Divisions.

2. Including FAR/FAN administrative services personnel totaling more than 25,000 men.

of low pay, poor training, and inadequate leadership continue unabated. By comparison, there have been relatively few signs of morale problems among either the PL or the NVA troops serving in Laos, although a few PL battalions in southern Laos have rallied to the government during the past several years. Both forces have, in general, fought effectively and well, even under difficult combat conditions.

11. Leadership throughout FAR/FAN generally is poor. Senior officers are usually aligned with one of the feudal power groups in Laos and as a group are not competent. Some younger officers are assuming positions of responsibility, but their influence will remain minimal as long as the "old guard" is in power. The most serious deficiencies in leadership exist at the company, platoon, and squad level. A prolonged period of peace may help to regenerate junior leaders, but such a change is not foreseen in the near term.

12. During the past several years, the irregulars have done practically all the serious fighting. Moreover, they have come to depend heavily on US air and advisory support. The US disengagement called for in the agreements concerning the cease-fire in Laos is certain to have an adverse effect on the overall operations and support capabilities of the friendly forces -- owing to the absence of both US air support and US advisers.

### The Firepower Balance

13. Traditionally, the combined US and Laotian air power has been the leveling influence offsetting the Communist ground superiority. Increasingly, however, Hanoi has upgraded its firepower to counteract friendly air capability. Although the size and extent of the Communist deployment of long-range field guns, antiaircraft artillery, and tanks to Laos has been far below the level of its firepower deployment into South Vietnam, it is significant relative to the scale of the war in Laos.

14. In northern Laos, Communist artillery and armor -- as well as combat forces -- are concentrated in MR II (see the map). Currently, the enemy is estimated to possess between 30 and 40 tanks and at least 75 heavy field weapons, including 85-mm and 130-mm field guns,<sup>4</sup> 105-mm and 122-mm howitzers, 122-mm rocket launchers, and 120-mm mortars. In addition to these weapons, the North Vietnamese are believed to have about 150 antiaircraft guns, including a number of 57-mm, 85-mm, and 100-mm weapons with fire-control radar.

15. In both MRs I and V, the artillery and armor capability of PL/NVA forces is relatively insignificant. However, the People's Republic of China maintains a sizable presence of some 25,000 troops in MR I in northwestern Laos, including some 4,000 personnel in four antiaircraft regiments. These units are estimated to have a total of more than 200 guns.

16. In southern Laos, Communist firepower is more evenly distributed between MRs III and IV. In these two regions, there are believed to be a combined total of some 20 to 25 tanks and between 40 and 50 heavy weapons, possibly including a few 122-mm and 130-mm field guns. In addition, there are eight antiaircraft regiments of North Vietnam's Air Defense Command in the Panhandle, the largest number of such units to be targeted against southern Laos during the war. These regiments are estimated to have more than 600 guns, as well as large numbers of SA-7 missiles, which are believed to have been first introduced into the Panhandle in April and May 1972. Besides these weapons, there are large numbers of air defense guns in those antiaircraft units in southern Laos that are directly subordinate to units of the North Vietnamese General Directorate of Rear Services.

17. The Royal Lao Government's firepower of large caliber weapons is based on the 105-mm and 155-mm howitzers, of which there are 55

4. The first known introduction of the 130-mm field guns into Laos was noted in November 1971, when 16 of the guns were detected deploying to the PDJ area. These guns enabled the North Vietnamese to quickly recapture the PDJ in December 1971 and to maintain heavy pressure on friendly forces during the 1972 offensive.



### Laos: Military Regions



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and 30 pieces, respectively, throughout all of Laos. With respect to accuracy, range, and rate of fire, however, these weapons are inferior to the Communist long-range artillery. The following tabulation depicts comparative range and rate of fire capabilities for the deployed weapons.

	Rounds per Minute <sup>1</sup>	Maximum Range (Meters)
Friendly		
US 105-mm howitzer	3	11,000
US 155-mm howitzer	1	14,600
Enemy		
Soviet 85-mm field gun	15-20	15,600
Soviet 122-mm howitzer	5-6	11,800
Soviet 122-mm field gun	6-7	21,900
Soviet 130-mm field gun	5-6	27,000

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1. Sustained rate of fire.

18. With the firepower balance on the ground clearly in favor of the Communists, the ability of the FAR/FAN to withstand enemy action will, in the future, depend much on the augmentation of both its air power and artillery. Progress is being made in both these areas, but the prospects are not good.

#### The Air Power Balance

19. Allied air power has always played an important role in the war in Laos. During the 1971/72 dry season, for example, about 10,000 attack sorties per month were flown in Laos -- the US air force flying roughly two-thirds of this total and the RLAF the other one-third. Although US planes have flown most of the strike sorties in Laos, most of these have been in the southern part of the country against logistical targets along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and thus these strikes have not had a great impact on the tactical situation.

20. US air support, however, has been critical to the friendly forces in Laos, especially in times of heavy fighting, and cannot be measured solely in terms of numbers. Perhaps the classic example of this support occurred during the summer of 1969 when massive US air support was provided for General Vang Pao's tactical thrust "Operation About Face" in northern Laos. During this period, US air strikes in northern Laos, which had been averaging some 50 strikes per day, rose sharply to more than

150 per day, including F-4 and F-105 strikes, enabling Vang Pao to retake the PDJ. In 1971 and 1972, air strikes were also instrumental in repelling enemy attacks against the key base of Long Tieng in southern Xiangkhoang Province. More recently, heavy US air support, including B-52 strikes, has been provided in support of friendly troops in southern Laos.

21. The RLAF currently has 168 aircraft, including 82 combat aircraft, as shown in the following tabulation:

Aircraft Type	Number Available
T-28	72
AC-47	10
C-47	21
H-34	26
O Y/U-17	29
C-123	10

The RLAF has the capability of flying roughly 4,000-5,000 attack sorties per month with these aircraft during the dry season, and somewhat less during the wet season. Even if the RLAF reached its full combat potential, however, it could not compensate for the loss of US air power. As shown in the inventory above, except for the 10 AC-47 gunships, the T-28 - a non-jet aircraft which is a converted trainer - is the only combat aircraft the RLAF possess. Although these have been used extensively in support of friendly ground forces in both the north and south during the war, they would be no match for the sophisticated North Vietnamese air defenses, if heavy fighting again broke out and there was no US air support. In both northern and southern Laos, Hanoi has established dense clusters of antiaircraft defenses around key areas, some of which are fire-controlled by radar, and it would be impossible for the RLAF to operate in these areas without suffering heavy losses.

22. Finally, Communist offensive air capabilities should be noted. Although North Vietnam has never flown any strikes in support of PL/NVA ground forces, with an inventory of eight IL-28 bombers and about 200 MIG-15, MIG-17, MIG-19, and MIG-21 aircraft, Hanoi has the capability to do so, especially if unchallenged by US aircraft. The current aircraft in the RLAF are not capable of preventing air strikes by the North Vietnamese.

### **The Logistical Balance**

23. Both sides in the Laotian conflict depend almost entirely on external support for their war effort; consequently, the logistical networks which deliver those supplies are critical factors in assessing relative capabilities. Logistical operations conducted by both sides are under some constraints; however, it is clear that neither side is short of supplies. The Communists have large stores of all types of supplies inside Laos and adequate reserves in southern North Vietnam which can be drawn on if required. RLG stockpiles inside Laos are considerably smaller, but this is offset to some extent by the fact that large quantities of supplies can be moved on short notice because logistical operations are largely carried out by air. Stockpiles in nearby Thailand to support such movements are substantial. Moreover, plans have been made to ensure the continued delivery of military supplies after the departure of US personnel.

24. Logistical capabilities of the two sides are seasonal in some respects. The Communist resupply effort, which depends on vehicle movements, is most successful in the dry season. During the summer when rains slow down truck movements that effort stalls. RLG resupply is carried out largely by air and also is most easily carried out during the dry season but can continue into the wet season. Thus, during the summer the logistical edge has traditionally gone to the friendly side. With a decline in US air support, this situation could change dramatically. Without such support the RLG would have no trouble meeting day-to-day requirements in a low-level combat environment, but could not handle the logistical requirements to support intense combat.

### ***Communist Logistical Capability***

#### ***Southern Laos***

25. The Communists' logistical position in southern Laos is potentially as strong as anywhere in Indochina. Since at least 1959 an extensive, tightly knit organization has evolved around the Ho Chi Minh Trail network and has, year after year, proved itself capable of meeting almost any logistical burden imposed on it. Although the primary function of this system has been to supply Communist forces in South Vietnam with military supplies and foodstuffs, an extremely important by-product – for the Communists – is that a quantity of every type of supply, well in excess of requirements, is readily available to Communist tactical forces in southern Laos.

26. The Communists' logistic structure in southern Laos has been upgraded and extended in recent years. Numerous new roads, including complete bypasses to the original Ho Chi Minh Trail complex, have been

constructed that add such redundancy to the system that it is virtually impossible to prevent supply movements during the dry season. When one road is blocked, traffic simply shifts to another. Furthermore, the development of this broader system spreads out Communist storage and transshipment facilities, making each less vulnerable to damage from air attack, and, more importantly, making the impact of the loss of one such area minimal in terms of the functioning of the entire system.

27. Supplies moved into southern Laos for use there or for transshipment to South Vietnam come from both North Vietnam and Cambodia. Almost without exception, military supplies come from the north. This includes not only weapons and ammunition, but also most of the petroleum, quartermaster, and engineering supplies. In addition, most of the food consumed by Communist forces in the northern part of the Laotian Panhandle or transshipped from Laos to northern South Vietnam arrives from North Vietnam. Supplies entering Laos from Cambodia are almost all foodstuffs – largely rice – which is procured in Cambodia. The flow of supplies from Cambodia is not as restricted during the rainy season as is the flow from North Vietnam. This difference results from the fact that heavy northbound traffic can continue on the Tonle Kong River during the rainy season, when truck traffic bogs down. In addition to the supplies obtained from external sources, there is a substantial body of evidence that some supplies (primarily food and quartermaster supplies) are procured locally within Laos.

28. It is from this extensive network that Communist forces in southern Laos derive their very strong logistical position. Although primarily geared to supporting Communist forces in South Vietnam, the system provides an excess for local tactical requirements.

29. Because of the dual role of the logistic system through southern Laos, it is impossible to delineate exactly which supplies are specifically earmarked for sustaining tactical activity there and which are to be transshipped to South Vietnam. In any case, there has never been any evidence of serious shortages of supplies for the tactical forces in the Panhandle, and whatever logistic problems may persist are in moving the supplies closer to the front lines. Even these problems have historically been minimal.

30. The Communists have now sustained a major military resupply campaign for six months. The effort first centered in North Vietnam, and during the period October through March, we estimate that 60,000 tons of supplies (including from 24,000 to more than 30,000 tons of ammunition) were moved toward South Vietnam, southern Laos, and Cambodia. By the end of 1972, supply movements into and through Laos

had increased markedly, and by February 1973, input to Laos reached its peak level of the dry season. In the period 1 February to 9 March, more than 9,000 tons of military supplies and food were moved into Laos via the Ban Karai Pass alone. Meanwhile, large quantities were also moving into Laos via roads west of the DMZ, and input was sustained, although at a lower level, through the Mu Gia Pass. Moreover, while average daily inputs to southern Laos since early March have declined somewhat, they remain at a high level.

31. With this heavy dry season effort behind them, and in the absence of US bombing, the Communist stockpile situation in southern Laos is probably very strong. In the past the combined storage of supplies in some areas of the Panhandle reportedly has reached several thousand tons. Although no stocks of that magnitude have been reported as being concentrated in any one place this year, recent reporting has revealed stockpiles of several hundred tons at various locations.

32. Even at a relatively high level of fighting in all of the major contended areas in the Laotian Panhandle, Communist daily resupply requirements for military supplies would probably not exceed 5 to 10 tons of supplies. Although our information is admittedly sparse, we estimate that stocks of military supplies are probably already on hand within Laos, or are available in the nearby North Vietnamese Panhandle, sufficient to sustain that level of activity for at least one year without any serious supply difficulties. Furthermore, the Communists' supply situation is not a static one. The level of stockpiles in Laos varies with the seasons, with the current local needs, and with the intensity of the Allied air and ground interdiction campaigns. If significant renewed hostilities were to resume in southern Laos, supplies to back that action would simultaneously be on their way from North Vietnam.

#### *Northern Laos*

33. Communist military activity in northern Laos is supported almost entirely by supplies from North Vietnam, although the Communists are able to procure some supplies (particularly rice and other foodstuffs) internally. Unlike their situation in southern Laos, Communist forces in the north do not have an integrated supply network, and the supplies required to support activity in the three major areas of Communist interest -- the PDJ region, the Samneua region, and the area around Luang Prabang -- enter via three distinct logistic corridors. Each of the corridors to these areas has an estimated capacity many times the requirements it must meet. Although activity on these corridors is impeded by seasonal weather, each has proved capable of providing adequate supplies during the annual dry season resupply campaign to meet the Communists' yearly requirements.

34. A number of logistic organizations deliver supplies from North Vietnam to northern Laos. NVA supply activity is conducted under the auspices of the General Directorate of Rear Services (GDRS) in Hanoi. A number of binh trams conduct the day-to-day logistics business fairly autonomously within their own areas of operation. Binh Tram 11, for example, is responsible for supply movement from North Vietnam into the Ban Ban area of northern Laos and has been the key unit in the current dry season resupply campaign. Operating along Route 7 from the Laos/North Vietnam border, Binh Tram 11 delivers supplies westward toward the PDJ. West of Ban Ban, logistic activity in recent years has been conducted under Binh Tram 13's guidance; however, the paucity of information this dry season has clouded Binh Tram 13's present role.

35. Complementing this structure, the NVA 25th Engineer Battalion has been active in the forward areas around the PDJ, primarily in maintaining lines of communication for the movement of artillery and the transshipment of supplies into the PDJ region. Similarly, a GDRS element -- Binh Tram 24 -- oversees Communist logistic activity along corridors into the Luang Prabang region, and the movement of supplies into the Samneua region is handled by a conglomeration of NVA, PL, and DN organizations.

36. The most important factor bearing on the present logistic position of NVA units operating in northern Laos is the success of their dry season logistical campaign that is just ending. Although COMINT relating to the actual movement of supplies within northern Laos provides only a hazy picture of where the cargo goes once it arrives in Laos, most of the information available reflects supply activity directed toward the PDJ region. Assessments of the other areas can best be made by implication.

37. From 1 October through the end of January, some 2,000 tons of ammunition and more than 800 tons of food, petroleum, and unidentified cargo were detected moving out Route 7. This represents more or less a routine resupply effort. However, after the cease-fire in South Vietnam went into effect on 28 January, the urgency of resupplying NVA units in northern Laos became more pronounced. Intercepted communications disclosed that there would be a campaign to move large quantities of materiel to northern Laos during the first 22 days of February, the goal being to deliver 6,600 tons of supplies. Subsequent intercepts detected about 2,000 tons being moved to northern Laos within the 22-day period (virtually all of it identified as ordnance) and it seems likely that at least a large portion of the remaining tonnage also was moved into northern Laos undetected.

38. Since 1 March, supplies have continued to be shipped to northern Laos with great regularity, although at a pace well below that observed

in February. At least 500 tons have been detected in COMINT since the beginning of March. Two other reports during March indicated there were also more than 900 tons in storage at the major transshipment point in North Vietnam for shipment to northern Laos.

39. Having moved these large quantities of supplies into northern Laos, current indications are that a major effort is being directed at moving them forward. Aerial photography during March and early April showed a substantial repair and upgrading effort on the major route between the North Vietnam border and the PDJ and on the major east-west roads spanning the northern PDJ. Close on the heels of the on-going repair activity has been evidence of heightened vehicle activity and the westward movement of supplies deeper into northern Laos. Photography of early April, for example, disclosed well over 100 cargo trucks traveling between the Laos/North Vietnam border and the PDJ, and there have been indications that the movement of supplies west from storage areas at Ban Ban is currently at extremely high levels. The implication is of a very strong present and future potential for the resupply of NVA units operating in the PDJ region. In the other regions of northern Laos, information on supply availability is negligible, but by analogy we estimate that the supply position is comparable to that in the PDJ region.

40. On balance, the North Vietnamese resupply position in northern Laos appears very strong. Although the level of supplies actually detected moving to northern Laos this season (5,500 tons) is about the same as that detected in the 1971/72 dry season (5,885 tons), the transportation campaign waged during February suggests that this year's effort surpassed last year's. Moreover, the level of fighting in northern Laos this dry season has been low compared with that of past seasons, and resupply needs have been commensurately lower. Consequently, the very large tonnages moved to northern Laos have not been drawn down to the degree they were in past dry seasons.

41. Furthermore, the composition of supplies moving toward northern Laos as the dry season has progressed provides insight into the present Communist logistic position in that area. Through February, the movement of weapons, ammunition, and other military goods constituted more than 70% of the total supplies detected moving toward northern Laos. Since the cease-fire in Laos went into effect on 22 February, there has been a significant shift toward the movement of foodstuffs. Although there continue to be small amounts of ammunition detected in COMINT, they represent only a small percentage of the total, suggesting that the North Vietnamese are satisfied with their ordnance stock levels in northern Laos. All things considered, the Communists probably have sufficient supplies in



northern Laos to cover almost any option they might choose in the next several months, including major offensive operations.

*Royal Laotian Logistic Capability*

42. Throughout the war the RLG has been heavily dependent on US logistic support. This support has worked well; except for occasional shortages – mainly the result of problems of forward distribution – there have been few serious logistic problems. Although there have been no significant deliveries of ordnance to the RLG since the 22 February cease-fire, there is at present sufficient ammunition and weapons in Laos to maintain the RLG for an indefinite period under current cease-fire conditions, and except for a few items, for about one month if heavy military activity were to resume.

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] More importantly, plans have been made to ensure the continued delivery of military supplies after the departure of US personnel. Planning is already under way to ensure the availability of supplies and equipment during fiscal year 1974. Delivery of military supplies will be made through logistics elements of the US Defense Attache's office, and it will be turned over to the RLG who will then be responsible for appropriate distribution.

43. To accomplish this, the RLG has reorganized its logistics system, emphasizing a more centralized approach aimed at reducing widespread duplication of skills, storage facilities, and maintenance activities. Under the new organization, these activities and functions are being centralized under the Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics. Also being created is a logistics battalion for each of the five military regions and a logistics battalion for each of two proposed strike divisions. In addition, US personnel are working closely with Royal Lao military personnel to help them gain self-sufficiency in as many areas as possible. The revamped logistics system will use available aircraft, military rolling stock, and commercial truck carriers and give the RLG increased capability to distribute supplies throughout the country. All of these actions should markedly improve the RLG's ability to receive, process, store, and deliver supplies and equipment throughout the country.

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45. The RLAF's logistics capability is presently enhanced by the addition of 10 C-123 transports, giving an additional lift capacity of about 5,000 tons per month – roughly doubling the present air transport capacity. While this transport capacity probably would suffice for a light level of military activity, heavier resupply requirements generated by increased tactical activity could not be met by it.

46. The RLAF will continue to face serious problems in delivering supplies to units in the field, a function which has hitherto been managed with large amounts of direct US assistance. During periods of heavy combat, delivery to deployed units has been made largely by helicopter or short take-off and landing (STOL) aircraft, and where landing facilities were inadequate or denied by enemy action, various parachute delivery techniques have been employed using large cargo ships such as the C-130s and C-123s. In addition, highly specialized night drop techniques have been used in areas where enemy antiaircraft fire makes daylight delivery hazardous. With only a limited number of C-123s and helicopters and no C-130s or STOL aircraft, the RLAF could not alone perform these tasks. In sum, the RLAF should continue to have no major problems, even with the expected decline in US support under the current cease-fire conditions of light military activity. If fighting again flares up, however, serious problems would develop, especially if previous levels of US support were not forthcoming.

#### The Near-Term Outlook

47. There are currently three areas of Communist tactical interest in Laos. The North Vietnamese firmly control the PDJ and are attempting to open Route 4 south to Ta Viang. In southern Laos, their areas of concern are Muong Phalane in central Savannakhet Province and the Bolovens Plateau in the lower third of the Panhandle. In the latter two of these regions, the enemy has established control, while currently the Communists are engaged in operations at Ta Viang in southern Xiangkhoang Province to achieve that goal.

48. Although friendly forces in northern Laos, with the aid of US air support, have been able to prevent the North Vietnamese from overrunning several strategic points during the past year, the fighting has demonstrated that the Communists retain the upper hand. During 1972, for example, the Communists effectively turned back Vang Pao's offensive in the PDJ at the end of the rainy season in August-October. After the failure of Vang Pao's offensive, the government abandoned its efforts to recapture the PDJ, thus enabling the enemy to strengthen and expand

control over the area. The addition of the North Vietnamese 88th Regiment to the enemy order of battle in northern Laos in late 1972 further enhanced the Communists' capability to defend the PDJ successfully prior to the signing of the cease-fire agreement.

49. In the Xiangkhoang sector the commitment of enemy manpower remains virtually the same as before the cease-fire. These forces, including six NVA infantry regiments as well as numerous PL/DN forces, are capable of holding all the territory currently under their control as well as applying pressure on RLG-dominated areas. In addition, morale among enemy forces, especially NVA veterans, is reported to be good. In contrast, friendly forces in the Xiangkhoang area are generally inferior to those of the enemy. Even the former irregulars -- considered to be the best of the friendly forces -- have had little inclination to fight since the announcement of the cease-fire. Morale among the Thai volunteers is also low. Thus, should the enemy make a determined effort to dislodge friendly defenders from their positions, they probably would be successful in a relatively short period of time, unless massive US tactical air support were provided. The odds are even less that government forces would be successful in initiating offensive activity, even without significant enemy resistance.

50. The Communists display a similarly strong interest in the Laotian Panhandle. Primarily this is because of the presence there of the large NVA rear services organization, which over the years has provided the means for the large movements of personnel and vital materials to Communist forces in South Vietnam and Cambodia, as well as southern Laos. Of the nine NVA infantry regiments providing some measure of support for the NVA rear services organization, six generally operate in and around the western edge of the logistics system from Thakhek in Khammouane Province south to the Bolovens Plateau, while the other three regiments operate farther to the east.

51. The western boundary of Communist control in southern Laos currently is the town of Muong Phalane in central Savannakhet Province, which was seized by the enemy just before the cease-fire. Despite the presence of the 29th NVA Regiment and elements of three additional regiments and supporting artillery, however, the enemy appears content to defend this western periphery of control rather than forcing the total withdrawal of RLG forces from the area.

52. The RLG posture in the Muong Phalane sector includes one mobile group formed from former irregulars and three FAR battalions. Although the morale and leadership of the mobile group is good overall, FAR unit leadership and troop morale varies from good to unsatisfactory. West of Muong Phalane, a second defensive line consisting primarily of six

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FAR battalions runs from north of Dong Hene southward to Keng Kok. Their presence contributes to the defense of Muong Phalane, but none of these units -- including those defending Muong Phalane -- probably would be able to thwart a heavy attack by the North Vietnamese.

53. Farther south, the enemy remains in firm control of the entire line-of-communications network, from Saravane southward to Paksong on the Bolovens Plateau which he captured on 22 February 1971. Elements of the three NVA regiments -- the 19th, 52nd, and 102nd -- which are currently deployed in the general Saravane area are clearly capable of preventing an attempted eastward expansion by RLG forces. Moreover, three other NVA regiments -- including the crack 9th Regiment -- are deployed farther south from Thateng to Paksong, where they would be able to repel government encroachments into the Bolovens.

54. Overall, the Communists at a minimum almost certainly intend to retain permanent control over the areas they now occupy, as well as to take any defensive action deemed necessary to ensure that this control is not threatened. In northern Laos, the enemy probably would like to recapture Sala Phou Khoun, west of the PDJ. This is the only important area in northern Laos not now held by the Communists which was in their hands at the time of the 1962 Geneva Accords, but political considerations may preclude an attempt to recapture it. Furthermore, the Communists currently appear determined to reestablish control over Route 4 in the vicinity of Ta Viang. The deployment of a large North Vietnamese force spearheaded by the 335th Regiment has largely been completed and the enemy has begun offensive activity to reassert control over the road and the surrounding area, which he controlled at least nominally at the time of the cease-fire. In the south, the NVA can be expected to defend the Muong Phalane and Bolovens Plateau areas against any government attempts to extend control closer to the NVA logistics system. In other areas of the Panhandle, there is no substantial evidence that the Communists plan attacks on such major towns as Pakse, Savannakhet, or Khong Sedone.

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